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ABSTRACT

This concept paper is intended to assist educators to understand why American culture has become so diverse, to review certain guiding principles and related research in effective educational practices for language instruction, and to present a number of instructional implications derived from the research. The recommendations for teachers which are presented in the paper are divided into principles for instruction, for reading, for oral communication, for writing, and for communicating with parents. A 37-item annotated bibliography is attached. (NKA)

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English Language Arts
Concept Paper

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Oregon Department of Education **Number 8**

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND ENGLISH INSTRUCTION CONCEPT PAPER

INTRODUCTION

The great diversity that envelopes our American culture has forced educators at all levels to look well beyond a classroom filled with only English speaking students who represent a single stratum of society. Oregon, like the rest of the nation, is experiencing an increase in nondominant cultures. These diverse cultures are represented by immigrants, for whom English may be a second language, and by native born citizens whose cultural background may include a nonstandard dialect of English.

The purpose of this concept paper is to assist educators to understand why American culture has become so diverse, to review certain guiding principles and related research in effective educational practices for language instruction and, finally, to present a number of instructional implications derived from the research.

Why Such Diversity?

Oregon classrooms have undergone a change from the standard English-speaking strongholds they were some years ago to classrooms which have been called upon to teach students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Greater diversity, moreover, is anticipated. Consider the following facts:

- According to Oregon Department of Education data, in 1970-71, of every 100 students in public schools, fewer than 5 were minorities. In 1987-88, more than 10 of every 100 students were minorities.
- Oregon has eight federally recognized tribes of Native Americans, each with its own unique cultural traits (Johnson, 1989).
- Oregon has been absorbing Asian immigrants since the late 1800's when Japanese and Chinese settlers arrived in relatively large numbers.
- In 1975 the first wave of Southeast Asian refugees arrived, representing many cultures, languages, and dialects.
- Economic and political changes throughout the world have brought more newcomers from Mexico, Central and South America, eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and countries in the Middle East.
- The transformation of American culture itself has resulted in the use of nonstandard dialects by more and more Americans whose native tongue is English and who represent all socio-economic classes and geographic regions. These linguistic changes are fueled by the accessibility of mass media.

The impact of the above on the workforce is, and will continue to be, startling. By the year 2000, nonwhites will make up 29% of the entrants to the workforce nationwide, with new immigrants representing a larger percentage of the increase in the population than do the native born. The fastest growing areas of employment for these new workers will be professional, technical and sales position, all of which require high levels of skill, including the ability to communicate effectively (Johnston and others, 1987).

To offer our students equal access to education, we as educators must become multiculturally sensitive (Logan, 1987). We must also be aware that every individual has his or her own culture and be appreciative of that culture, mindful of the impact on it of "physical, biological, social, political, communicative, evaluative and economic" systems (Goodlad, 1987). In fact, many sociologists, economists, politicians and educators agree that *"...a greater emphasis in the values, thought, and history of diverse cultures could*

produce significant new amounts of human and social capital for the United States to engage in international commerce and political activity" (Sticht and McDonald, 1989). Clearly the task that faces Oregon educators is a complex, multidimensional one that will not be easily achieved.

To offer our students equal access to education, we as educators must become multiculturally sensitive.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

Most children come to school proficient in their home language, whether it be Standard American English, a language other than English, or a nonstandard dialect of English. They are not lacking in language; however, the language background they bring may be different from that of the school. Similarly, all children come to school with a set of cultural experiences. If the culture is not the same as that of the school, which reflects the dominant culture, it is important to understand that the children are not culturally deprived. They are merely culturally different. Individuals within both the dominant culture and the nondominant cultures share the coresponsibilities of respect and understanding.

Since we cannot assume that all students use the language of the classroom when they start school, it is the task of the school, now more than ever before, to teach that language. Central to academic success are the skills related to communication; listening, speaking, reading, and writing Standard American English, the language of the classroom.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

What is effective education for children of diverse language backgrounds? A substantial amount of research describes effective education for these students (Hakuta and Gould, 1987).

Much of the research is illustrated within the five basic principles from the state of California document, *Basic Principles For The Education Of Language—Minority Students: An Overview*, 1982. These principles were developed with nonnative speakers in mind. The concepts themselves apply, however, to users of nonstandard dialects as well.

- **The first principle** maintains that a high level of proficiency in both languages of the bilingual child is positively associated with high achievement. The ability to use two languages has been found to increase cognitive functioning. (Hakuta, 1986) Conversely, a child whose first language stops developing when a second language is added may experience difficulty in reaching a high level of competence in the second language. (Cummins, 1984).

  It is important for the child to be supported in his first language until competence is achieved in the language of the classroom. Although bilingual programs may not be economically feasible in schools with few minority language students, parents can be encouraged by the school to give first language support by telling stories, singing songs, and conversing with children in their native languages or dialects.

- **The second principle** divides language proficiency into two domains: language used for interpersonal communication and language used for academic purposes. Students will relatively quickly acquire the ability to communicate orally in their second language or dialect. Social situations are rich in context that make meaning clear before the learner may actually understand the meaning of conversations. On the other hand, language used in academic situations is used with less context or with an abstract context unfamiliar to the student. Linguistically different youngsters need to be proficient in this academic language to be successful in school.

- **The third principle** stresses the interdependence of the child's two languages. Those concepts which are taught in the first language will readily transfer to the second language once a certain level of proficiency in the second language is acquired. Individuals learn to read once, to count once, to do long division once, and as another language is learned these skills are transferred to the new language or dialect.

- **The fourth principle** describes the environment where second language learning takes place. The second language input must be com-

prehensible to be learned. In order for anything to be learned, the human mind must understand how the new information relates to what is already known about the world. Without understanding this relationship, the new information just becomes nonsense (Smith, 1985).

In order to facilitate this connection with the student's prior knowledge, the teacher needs to be knowledgeable and understanding of the background of the child and to incorporate as much of each child's cultural heritage as possible into the curriculum. In lessons about families, for example, show pictures that reflect a wide variety of lifestyles. When studying food and nutrition, include the diets of various cultures. Have available books from a variety of cultures and read them as a natural part of the school day, not just for the special week or month of recognition of a particular culture.

- **The fifth principle** emphasizes the importance of the context in which language acquisition and academic learning take place. It states that the perceived status of minority groups in the schools, communities, and society affects student outcomes. The teacher attitudes and expectations toward students may vary according to their ethnic or socioeconomic status, and these expectations have a direct bearing on student achievement (Good, 1981). In fact, "...(n)egative teacher attitudes toward nonstandard dialects [and by extension toward those who use them] have been identified by many as a large part of the problem [of lack of success in school]" (Farr and Daniels, 1986).

Cultural Influences on Academic Success

Cultural influences beyond language may also have an impact on students' achievement in school. In studying adolescents in Harlem, Labov (1972) found that there were some teenagers who demonstrated the ability to be successful in school but who were not. He concluded that they rejected the school culture because it conflicted with the street culture where they felt comfortable. In the Kamehameha Early Education Program in Hawaii, student achievement was dramatically improved by changing the structure of the learning situations to more closely follow the cultural patterns of the Hawaiians of Polynesian descent (Jordan, 1983).

In studying Native American children on the Warm Springs Reservation in Central Oregon, Philips found that the children would answer questions at home, but in school they would not because of the "absence of the appropriate social conditions for communicative performances." The teachers, non-Native Americans, did not know of those conditions and as a result perceived the children as not understanding the subject matter (Philips, 1972).

"Instruction in literacy, then, for those students who do not come from mainstream culture, is partially a matter of acculturation to mainstream culture. Many of the difficulties that such students have in succeeding and becoming literate in school can be explained by the complexity of the differences between their home culture and the school culture" (Farr and Daniels, 1986).

Students from other cultures utilize discourse styles that are different from that of the school. Although these styles may be difficult for those who are not a part of that culture to follow, they have a logic and system of their own (Smitherman, 1977; Erickson, 1984; Michaels, 1981). For example, Black Vernacular English has a highly developed syntactical system which is different than Standard American English, particularly in verb tense. Therefore, "..(I)n order for any kind of teaching to be effective, teachers must understand as fully as possible the resources their students bring with them to school. Utilizing and building on these resources are the keys to teaching writing to nonmainstream students" (Farr and Daniels, 1986).

Since we cannot assume that all students use the language of the classroom when they start school, it is the task of the school, now more than ever before, to teach that language.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

Goal:

The primary objective of language arts teachers in all grades must be to enable all students to use correct Standard American English in those situations where formal usage is required. While carrying out this mission, language arts teachers must simultaneously engender respect for other languages and cultures.

LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSES SHOULD OBSERVE THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPLES

In Instruction:

Teachers should:

- Extend "wait time" to allow students to process information and formulate a response.
- Where possible, remove time limits in testing situations.
- Be aware of the language requirements of each learning task and provide a rich context to ensure understanding (i.e. pictures, models, demonstrations, examples, role playing, etc.).
- Select materials which do not imply the superiority of one culture over others.
- Include lessons on alternative ways people from various cultures have met common human needs.
- Regard students from minority cultures as resources, using them and their parents to share their background or expertise (Rodrigues and White, 1974).
- Treat errors in spoken and written English as indications of the stage a student has reached in the acquisition of Standard American English. The freedom to experiment and make mistakes is an important part of language development (Horning, 1987).

Teachers should be aware of the language requirements of each learning task and provide a rich context to ensure understanding.

In Oral Communication:

Teachers should:

- Respect all dialects and accents, and emphasize communicating meaning.
- Speak Standard American English, but not interrupt a student's remarks by correcting nonstandard constructions occurring in oral communication. To correct a child's grammatical errors while that child is in the midst of making a point is inappropriate.
- Provide opportunities for students to engage in sustained conversations with speakers using Standard American English. These conversations should focus as much as possible on substantive material dealt with in the classroom. Cooperative learning activities can provide some of those experiences (Labov, 1983).
- Make language itself a subject of discussion in their classrooms. Student discussions of differences and similarities in dialect and languages should be encouraged (Farr and Daniels, 1986).
- Recognize that correct Standard American English is most effectively taught by asking students to write and speak the language rather than by asking them to concentrate on mastering discrete parts of speech.

In Reading:

Teachers should:

- Provide books in the classroom showing peoples from many cultures within the United States and throughout the world. These books should accommodate a variety of reading levels.
- Read aloud to students. Those shared reading provide language models as well as creating opportunities for discussion of a variety of topics.
- Encourage students to discuss what they are reading in class with their classmates and with the teacher.
- Help students make connections between what they are reading and their own lives. Activities should be introduced which encourage students to see these connections between books and experience.
- Assign readings consisting of sustained passages that describe a scene, portray an episode, or present a character, rather than isolated sentences or very brief paragraphs.
- Use pre- and post-reading activities to provide a meaningful context and build comprehension.

In Writing:

Teachers should:

- Provide frequent opportunities for students to write for a variety of audiences and for a variety of purposes.
- Provide opportunities for students to write often. Frequent attempts to write paragraphs, letters, stories and essays will help them learn to convey meaning clearly.
- Allow students to choose their own topics for some writing assignments.
- Help students to see that writing is a process involving initial efforts to get ideas down on paper; then begin to organize and fill in details with the final work in revising and editing for correctness.
- Encourage students to write about their own experiences and about matters that are significant to them personally.
- Confer with students individually to discuss their writing. Individual meetings to talk about student writing are enormously helpful because instruction can be focused at the student's developmental level and writing needs.
- Keep in mind the circumstances influencing the writing when evaluating student work; i.e., cultural background, home environment, length of time allowed for the assignment, and so forth.
- Encourage students to participate in peer response groups. Working with peers benefits nonstandard English speakers by allowing them to identify and discuss issues related to clarity and correctness.

In Communicating With Parents:

Schools and teachers should:

- Know that all parents care.
- Make contact with parents in their homes when possible and appropriate.
- Find out what goals parents have for their children and how schools and families can work together to support the child's learning.
- Encourage parents to support their children in school by strengthening the home language and by communicating their concerns and goals to the school and teacher.
- Make parents feel welcome in the school. Provide interpreters when possible and include employees from diverse cultures and languages at all levels of occupations in the school setting.

For teacher training the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification Standards (Logan, 1987) has suggested that all teachers have:

- Knowledge of linguistic differences.
- Knowledge of the ways in which cultures differ.
- Knowledge of the relationship between varying lifestyles, values and beliefs in a multicultural society.
- Knowledge of adaptation of materials and instruction to needs of learners.
- Knowledge of how to apply cultural awareness to teaching.

Effective teaching strategies are particularly critical to the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

CONCLUSION

The challenge for Oregon schools is to provide curriculum and instruction which meets the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. For teachers of English language arts, a knowledge of cultural and linguistic differences and a repertoire of instructional strategies which will effectively assist students in acquiring a range of levels of language appropriate to various situations is essential. Effective teaching strategies are particularly critical to the success of culturally and linguistically diverse students (NCTE, 1986).

As more teachers have been working on writing process activities with children of various levels of English proficiency they have found that children can compose in their second language or dialect before they have total control over the systems of English. All writers move through a continuum from fluency, to form, and finally to control with each piece of writing. This is an especially important process for students of diverse language background who frequently struggle so hard with correctness in the early stages of a piece of writing that they lose the flow of ideas. This opportunity to write also contributes to their developing proficiency in English (Ammon, 1985; Berry, 1988; Goodman, 1984; Hudelson, 1983).

Many nonstandard English speakers believe their academic problems are intellectual, and because they feel less capable their ability to learn is hampered. With the opportunity to read, write, speak and listen under the encouragement of a teacher who is able to explain the differences in grammatical structures between the first language or dialect and the second language or dialect, the students' defensiveness begins to break down and self-concept and achievement begin to grow (Cleary, 1988). As teachers continue to support the language growth of both nonnative speakers of English and speakers of nonstandard dialects, the benefits will accrue to individual students and to an increasingly multicultural society.

"I feel very sad when I hear Vietnamese kids who speak English with their parents. I don't know why. Some parents think if their children can speak English very well, they will be proud. The big trouble is their children speak English all of the time. They might forget their mother tongue.....Starting from now, try to speak with your friend with your language. The languages you know, the more you can communicate with others." (Anh Le, 17 year old boy from Grant High School, 1988.)

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The committee on Classroom Practices of NCTE has published 25 articles by teachers throughout the United States on specific teaching ideas for working with students of diverse language backgrounds. The articles cover journal writing, spelling and grammar logs, peer teaching ideas, steps in second language development and much more helpful information for teachers who have had little or no experience with these students.

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The first half of this book reviews what research shows at this time, regarding language diversity and literacy development. The second half of the book lists fifteen key factors associated with effective writing instruction and describes them fully for the classroom teacher.

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Hansen-Krening, Nancy. Competency and Creativity in Language Arts: A Multi-Ethnic Focus. Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1979.

The author presents specific lesson ideas for listening, speaking, reading, writing, moving and acting which incorporate multiethnic materials. She includes helpful bibliographies and sources.

Hansen-Krening, Nancy. Language Experiences For All Students. Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1982.

This is a step by step "how to" book for using language experience to teach reading and writing to beginning and intermediate learners. The author argues that this approach is an effective way to teach English as a second language and a very natural way to incorporate the cultural backgrounds of all children into the classroom.

Heath, Shirley B. Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

In this ethnographic study of language development in children from two neighboring but cultural differences prepare children for either a match or mismatch with that of the school. This book is so well written it makes good vacation reading, also.

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This directory includes demographic information, listings for each tribe, and listings for various services available for American Indians.

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This brochure, developed by the Task Force on Racism and Bias, identifies appropriate strategies in a concise format for teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students.

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Rigg, Pat. and D. S. Enright. Children and ESL: Integrating Perspectives. Washington, D.C.: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 1986.

The editors of this book see the need for integrating the perspectives of both teachers and researchers so that teachers see themselves as researchers are involved in teaching. The included papers show that ESL students can do and how their teachers can help them.

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Smitherman, Geneva. Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977.

Sticht, Thomas G. and Barbara A. McDonald. *"Making the Nation Smarter: The Intergenerational Transfer of Cognitive Ability"* San Diego, CA: Applied Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences, Inc., Jan. 1989.

Urzua, Carol. Talking Purposefully. Silver Spring: Institute of Modern Languages, Inc., 1981.

Carol Urzua has written a "how to" book to help teachers set up learning situations in their classes so that their students will be talking purposefully and in that way learning language.

LOCAL RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Interface Network
4800 S.W. Griffith Drive, Suite 202
Beaverton, Oregon 97005.

This technical assistance center provides training and information in multicultural education, and migrant and bilingual programs at no cost to Oregon districts.

Oregon Indian Education Association
P.O. Box 2066
Salem, Oregon 97308-2066.

This professional organization provides assistance to teachers through conferences and newsletters designed to promote appropriate education for and about Indian people. Membership is $10 per year.

The Oregon Multicultural Association
2049 S.E. Main
Portland, Oregon 97214.

This professional organization provides assistance to teachers through conferences, monographs, and networking in support of multicultural education. Membership is $15 per year.

ORTESOL (Oregon Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages).
Center for English as a Second Language
Portland State University
Portland, OR 97207.

This professional organization provides assistance to teachers through a newsletter, journal and conferences. Membership is $15 per year.

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The review of research and initial draft of this paper was done by a committee of Oregon educators. From the committee's work, an initial draft was prepared by Carlyn Syvanen, ESL/Bilingual assistant superintendent, Portland Public Schools. The paper was revised to reflect comments from Oregon educators and published by the Department of Education.

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State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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